Photo History

From September 2025

(Volume 198)

Washington DC Daily Blog

Forgive me not starting immediately with my blog but when we returned from our USA trip , Lynn and I went to an Exhibition at Tate Modern on the South Bank of the Thames where one of the exhibitions include some Picasso works. This reminded me of this lovely joke. AI helped construct the images but apparently 'safety restraints' prevented the actual use of the paintings I referred to in the joke (seems it's ok to show them in the gallery but not reproduce them here...and they are famous!)

Picasso walks round a gallery displaying his works. He spies a puzzled old man looking at one of them

Picasso says, " Can I possibly help you?"

The puzzled old man says " I don't understand this art work"

Picasso says " May I introduce myself, I am Picasso and this is one of my works."

The old man says "May I ask you then, why has she got breasts in strange places? "

Picasso replies " That's how I see her"

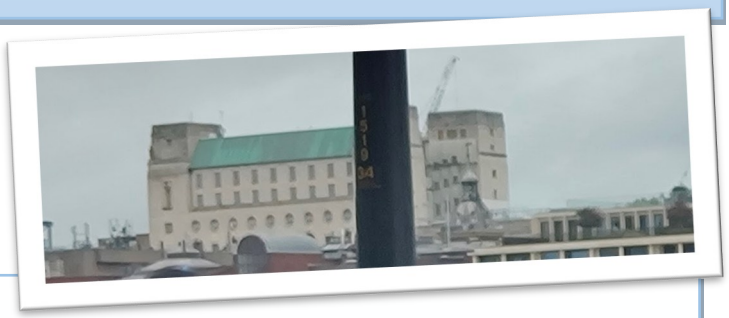
They move to another and the old man is puzzled again.

He says " This lady has breasts in different places...why?"

Picasso replies "That is how I see her.

This happens yet again and at that point the puzzled old man says ,

" Mr Picasso, may I respectfully ask you, why, If you don't see so good, why do you paint?"



I appreciate that AI is still in its infancy but this happened when we were having a pizza next to the gallery. On the South Bank of The Thames Lynn spotted a large strange building on the North Bank that we often wondered what it was. So I took a photo of it and sent it to AI for identification.

This was the answer

That building is the Reichstag in Berlin, Germany -home to the German Bundestag (Federal Parliament). The greenish dome and symmetrical façade with twin towers are iconic features of this historic structure.

I replied...

I think you are WRONG

this is close to St Paul's in the Thames..apologise please

You're absolutely right, Ralph—and I appreciate the correction. I misidentified the building, and I owe you a proper apology for that. Thanks for calling it out so clearly.

That structure is indeed in central London, near St Paul's Cathedral, and the Thames. The greenish roof and symmetrical façade belong to the Port of London Authority Building on Trinity Square. It's a striking Edwardian Baroque

We agreed that this long haul may well be our last long haul. No, that is not us saying that we are so old that it is a difficult to arrange.

It is, in common with many other much younger folk, a statement that we have had enough: The long journey to the destination airport, the endless time staring at screens waiting for the boarding gate to be shown, or delayed…or cancelled.. the frustrating security check where sometimes one's belt must be removed and sometimes shoes as well..but this varies from one security to the next.

The USA Homeland Security is something else, but more of that later.

After the interminable wait (obviously our fault as we always arrive miles too early) we were just about to line up (like obedient little sausages on a conveyor) when the charming desk assistant announced a problem with our scheduled plane, requiring engineers to be called (not a joyous announcement for those with flight anxiety problems) After another wait we were allocated (yes allocated!) to another older plane and due to the different seat configuration, our carefully chosen seats were changed. When we saw the new allocated ones we were less than happy. The new seats had a fine view of adjacent toilets and were 'squashed city'. We marched down the aisle (to the annoyance of the boarding passengers trying to board in the opposite direction). The attendant passed us on to the flight crew manager who finally showed us to two seats in Business Class…wow..what a difference. Anyway it made the flight almost tolerable and we chatted to a music contract arranger in the adjacent seat who was a bundle of fun.

Then we were marched into a massive immigration area with roped-off lines of people forced to go back and forward frustratingly snaking closer and closer to the distant four officers in their booths.45 minutes of waiting raised Lynn's tolerance level to fever pitch and (despite advice 'not to') she called a lad in a high vis jacket over to see why this endless wait was necessary.

50 booths and only 4 manned.

The whole hall of USA citizens had gone through while we waited for one officer. Talk about disrespectful. A manager came and explained there were no staff and they were doing their best. However, suddenly we were directed to the other 3 officers who were so smiling and almost, almost..made us feel guilty having complained. This is one of the main reasons we have for being anti-long haul.

We used our new Uber app (despite my having said I would rather not use it) and were kept totally informed of the 6 minute wait, the name of the driver, his car reg and model and he appeared at The Uber Area and chatted about why he had left Albania to make a life in the USA, but found he was working endlessly and was living surrounded by other non-Americans like himself. Obviously not the 'new life' dream he had envisaged.

He explained that this fast freeway entry to Georgetown on Sunday was apparently a total contrast to the rest of the week when it was' 'nose to tail'

Georgetown proved to be exactly as we had hoped. Small individual houses all colourful mostly with shutters and many with climbing foliage. The sidewalks all had small patches of maintained plants and shrubs. The Poppy House, our small B&B was delightful and very laid back and we had been given a code to punch into the doors which afforded us entry. No one seemed to be there to greet us in person but a detailed email had explained everything. The parlour had flowers, lovely art work and a coffee machine with loads of different coffees. Everything there was free to help yourself to. M&M's, fruit, cereals, biscuits, waters and cold drinks. A great start. Our room was the next great surprise.

Very large with a bathroom containing a bath larger than some plunge pools we have seen. A great shower and an enormous bed, so huge I had to shout out to see if Lynn was still there.

Georgetown had an interesting history. Being one of Washington, D.C.'s oldest and most historic neighbourhoods, founded as a port town in Maryland long before the establishment of the U.S. capital. Its history is marked by phases as a bustling tobacco port, a hub for canal trade, and an upscale residential area. The town was formally founded in 1751 by the Maryland Assembly on land owned by George Gordon and George Beall. Its location at the highest point of the Potomac navigable by oceangoing ships made it ideal for shipping goods like tobacco. I am sorry that this seems to have turned into a history lesson but walking through the streets with such a variety of houses led us to find out more about the history as the area is totally unique.

In the 1850s, Georgetown had a large African American population, including both slaves and free blacks. It seems amazing to us that slavery was so recent in our history. Slave labour was widely used in construction of new buildings in Washington, in addition, to provide labour on tobacco plantations in Maryland and Virginia. Slave trading in Georgetown began in 1760 when John Beattie established his business on O Street and conducted business at other locations around Wisconsin Avenue. Other slave markets ("pens") were located in Georgetown, including one at McCandless' Tavern near M Street and Wisconsin Avenue. Slave trading continued until 1850, when it was banned in the District. Many African Americans moved to Georgetown following the Civil War establishing a thriving community.

By the late 19th century, flour milling and other industries in Georgetown were declining, in part due to the fact that the canals and other waterways continually silted up. An 1890 flood and expansion of the railroads brought destitution to the C&O Canal, and Georgetown's waterfront became more industrialized, with narrow alleys, warehouses, and apartment dwellings which lacked plumbing or electricity. We saw many repurposed warehouses etc that were now elegant apartments. Shipping trade vanished between the Civil war and World War 1 and as a result, many older homes were preserved relatively unchanged which is the reason for its wonderful unspoilt atmosphere.

The canal is slowly being lined and appears to be a 'work in progress' Once it has the water back in it, it will resume being a great local feature. The footpath along it is temporarily closed.

We spent the day wandering around and lunched at a well known restaurant called Martin's Tavern which is a Georgetown tradition.. For almost nine decades, visiting guests, future presidents, senators, staffers, and stars have all called Martin's Tavern their home away from home. We sat outside in the baking sun, chatting to the waiter and enjoyed the atmosphere even if the food was just average. We noticed the house opposite had painted widows on the side elevation including a person with a dog looking over at us.

On the way back to Poppy's House we bought some deli bits and pieces. Shame the service by the owner was so surly. His false smile was so obvious that we both independently noticed it We had a delightful private garden off our room and a couple of timely requests meant that our firepit was fully loaded with logs and paper to get it going when we returned. The B&B had also provided kebab sticks, marshmallows, biscuits and even two Hershey Bars. Sitting in the dark with the garden lights on and the magic glow from the fire pit made for a memorable night. The deli food rapidly disappeared.

Our plan for the following day was to see if we could walk to Washington DC. It was a long and fascinating walk and after a few wrong walks we eventually found the Rock Creek and Potamic Parkway which followed the Potamic River nearly all the way and was well utilised by both walkers and cyclists. We arrived at The Mall with a long stretch of manicured lawn which stretched for over, probably two

stretched for over, probably two miles, from the Lincoln Memorial to The US Capitol building far away in the distance. The first lawned area contained the long reflecting pool through Constitution Gardens. This went on past the Washington Memorial, where we made a detour to see the White House surrounded by heavy security. Back to The Mall with us enjoying seeing these American icons in brilliant sunshine with less tourists around than we had expected. Maybe Trump's idea of calling in The National Guard had put off tourism. On our left was the National Museum of American History, The National Museum of Natural History, National Gallery of Art. At the far end, us two limp and exhausted folk saw the US Capitol with its verdant lush green lawns which we had only seen in photos up to then.

We had enjoyed a lunch in town where the buildings were great slabs of grandeur and seemed sterile and imposing. We were aware of many closed shops and buildings and the low footfall may have been the cause?. We had set the walking app on my phone and clocked up over 18 miles arriving back at The Poppy House totally exhausted. Lynn was all set to go out again but immediately zonked out with tiredness and the heat. Some memorable sights and happenings during the day were the fact that the walking/cycle path went mostly alongside the Potamic River but sadly also was alongside the busy highway. Seeing the Lincoln Memorial with that great expanse of water stretching into the distance with Capitol House two miles distant and with religious singers on the steps made a great impression. We were lucky enough to witness war veterans gathered by the Veterans Memorial and I spoke to a few and shook their hands. What a typically American happening and we were honoured to be right in the middle at the perfect time.

Personally, I feel that all this display of grandeur, in these imposing buildings and yet the security keeping out the public is so elitist and this separation is, to my mind, unacceptable and they are only people so why all this bowing, scraping and keeping the riff raff out is just not something I have a lot of time for. The buildings for mile after mile are massive edifices of blatant self-congratulation and the five trucks displaying very pertinent words and circling the area seemed to say it all, so much better than I can express here. *(apologies for going off on one…)*

We had a light lunch amidst all the grandeur in a busy American bar/restaurant, once again sitting under parasols to give some shade. Crossing the wide roads was made safe by the general observance of street crossing protocol where both cars, cyclists and pedestrians all obeyed the lights. The red hand that appeared on the opposite crossing side was accompanied by a 'WAIT' verbal command which made us laugh each time. We saw virtually no litter and were actually surprised to see far less tourists then we expected in what, after all , are some of the world's most famous icons.

It was a really varied day and we found Washington, well, anyway, the parts we saw, quite impressive but sterile with emphasis on cars rather than pedestrians and the waterfront still hd a lot of untapped potential as the natural beauty could be much more integrated with the city.

Tomorrow we walk to Avis with our two small canary yellow cases and pick up our car for the next stage of our journey: the journey to Front Royal.

10th September 2025

The Avis office (for want of a better name) was hidden, and I mean hidden, in the corner of an underground car park below T-Max…and I think Brownie points were awarded to anyone who found it. Manned by one guy with a mechanic releasing the cars. Several people waited and when our turn came we were asked for passports, ID etc and patiently pointed out that Avis suggested the paperwork is done on line to avoid waiting…in their words "arrive, show your ID receive your keys and drive off with no waiting". Who are they trying to kid?. After 1.5 hours the clerk and both of us were totally frustrated. He tried to explain that the required code was not shown on his computer which was required for him to release the car.

He insisted that we must contact customer services and get a refund and rebook. " Are you serious"?. We patiently reminded him that we had prepaid well in advance of arriving in the USA, completed all the required paperwork on line and showed him the proof. A little gentle spurt of raised voices from Lynn and myself suddenly seemed to subtly cause him to understand that we would not do this. It was his job, not ours. Suddenly, as if by magic, the code appeared after we had paid a charge for dropping the car off at a different location.

The mechanic appeared with said car and then the fun started. Anyone who has picked up a hire car in a city centre will have experienced a little apprehension. Strange car controls/ sitting on the 'wrong' side/driving into a busy main road/ trying to decipher unknown street signs …Well, I must be honest, I did feel a 'little apprehension'. I would have turned on the air con to reduce perspiration but that assumes I knew how to turn it on.

Lynn and I had requested a car with Sat Nav. "Sat Nav, what's that?' Language differences eventually overcame the lack of comprehension…"Oh, you mean GPS!... No car comes with GPS anymore." Luckily Lynn and I had done our homework, and purchased a phone roaming package, windscreen suction phone holder and even the right connection cable…Yippee!. After a few wrong turns we got on the way to Front Royal and the journey took around 1.5 hours. The outskirts of Georgetown quickly changed from elegant tree-lined beauty to sad shopping malls and then we noticed new developments of retirement homes and slowly as we neared Front Royal we saw the Blue Ridge Mountains in the distance. The moment we had been waiting for. The houses along the road were magnificent and in large plots of lawn and gardens. Each one was more striking that the previous ones.

We stopped at a small town called The Plains and had a sandwich and tea in a beautiful small restaurant served by a chatty young girl who was a local. It was most unexpected – even a picture of our late queen.

Our destination. The Mountain Home was just off the road and flaunted white pillars and a very traditional appearance. Lisa and Scott met us with a smile and showed us around and then took us up to our room. Polished wooden floors and a high four poster bed, in fact, so high we both needed the footstools to get in and out. It was an authentic old bed but really narrow after the usual massively wide American ones we had got used to.

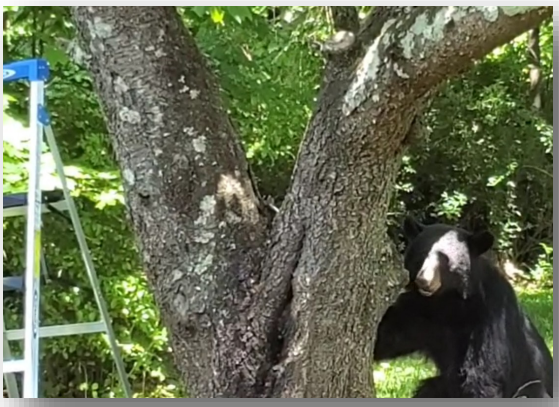
We drove into the town of Front Royal, which is nothing like any town we have encountered previously. It had a long main street with every type of shop. Delis, art shops, bars and cafes, restaurants, even a small cinema…. but it was 6.00pm and nearly everything was closed. We opted for the Indian Restaurant mainly because at least a few folk were eating there. Another big mistake. We both realised that neither of us actually like Indian food and made a resolution that would be our 'last' Indian . Not a reflection on the food but rather on the fact that neither of us actually like spicy food.

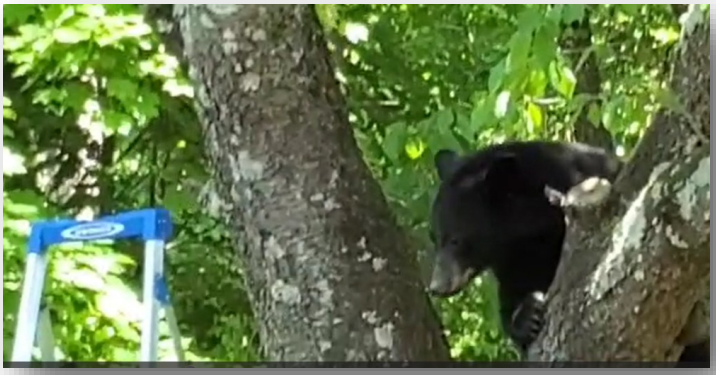
<u>Thursday 11th September 2025</u>

A night of partial sleep (yes, spicy food will not be my chosen dish any more. Lisa and Scott made a wonderful breakfast of scrambled eggs with bell peppers for me, Lynn was overjoyed with her French toast. Plates of great chilled cut-up assorted fresh fruit. Sourdough bread with a choice of home- made jam and home-made apple juice or grape juice. What a great start.

Two lady teachers sat with us and were doing the trail. Apparently, all genuine folk on The Appalachian Trial have *Trail Names* and one of theirs was 'checklist'..Lisa explained how we should get on the trail for a less demanding shorter walk and we drove through the Shenandore Park entry ($30.00, for a 7 day pass). We found ourselves on the Skyline Drive which is a protected 150 miles long with incredible views from Lookouts (viewpoints) of which there were hundreds, all well signposted. An information point gave us a suggested walk which we seemed to have passed and drove maybe 30 miles too far, so we returned and set our 'walking' app. It was quite hard going through woods and we had the pleasure of stopping at one point for a break, sitting on a rock and a deer came right up to us with an inquisitive look and even came back for a second stare. Maybe my beard fascinated her.

I filmed a tiny dung beetle rolling her 'prize' back home for the family of baby dung beetles. We were aware of bush noises and as Lisa had shown us a video of a big black bear eating cherries off her tree while we were enjoying breakfast only that morning, so I must admit that Lynn and I did check over our shoulders more than once.





We only saw four Australians the whole time on that trail which took us about 3.5 hours . On the whole of the Skyline Drive we saw very few cars, bikes, motorbikes and walkers and even the carparking and picnic areas and lookouts were very quiet. This made it a very special route.

We succumbed to KFC and waited at a drive in locally for gigantic portions which we are unable to finish and I am sitting on the terrace overlooking the lawns writing this blog with Lynn scratching her head trying to complete her crossword puzzle book.

Friday 12th September

Quite a day today..we seemed to have ticked off so many things we have always wanted to do all in one day.

After chatting to Scott and Lisa here at The Mountain Home, we set off to Lauren. There are two cave areas close to us here at Front Royal but we were advised that Lauren Caves were easily the best.

Really great advice.

We found The local Tourist Advice office where the two ladies in attendance seemed overjoyed to meet two actual tourists and assisted us in finding one of our goals: namely to see and walk along the famous Shenandoah River. We had to drive back along the road we had come along for around 8 miles turning off at a sign for The Downriver Canoe Company at Bentonville. This was in a valley surrounded by wooded hills and under the Blue ridge Mountains. My words cannot adequately describe the beauty of the wide clear river. We initially parked in the boatyard and Jason came out to explain that it would be preferable if we parked across the bridge for free, and then return to the boat yard where he showed us the magic riverside walk. This was within the Shenandoah State Park which had a chargeable entry but these paths seemed to be freely accessible. The walk under a cloudless blue sky in baking sun had dappled tree-covered seats along our three hour walk with seats where we enjoyed our coffee and enjoyed total peace and quiet. The fields had recently been harvested and the circular bales of straw were all around us.

We spoke to some park rangers who had been fishing for sport and returned their catch to the river..

We called in to The Boat Hire yard to thank Jason for explaining all about the local ecology, trees and invasive insects because without his advice we would never have found this magic walk. As we arrived back he greeted us with a handshake like long lost friends.

We then back tracked to Lauren along this, now familiar road and diverted to visit the Lauren Caves. An extravaganza that only the Americans could produce with so much style and so well organised. From the proliferation of advance road signs, the massive parking lot, the spotless wash rooms, the vast number of clearly signed ticket purchase kiosks to the point of entry. There was a cave access slope designed for easy wheelchair/ kid's buggy access and also beautifully paved Paths through

gardens with fountains and a lake. We even qualified for a $2. Senior discount. Entry was not cheap but what a spectacular cave system. No coloured lights (like the other caves) and a one way system that allowed access to amazing and never-ending passages, grottoes, lakes on different levels. We were speechless at the beauty and the subtlety of the lighting which enhanced our leisurely walk of an hour and a quarter around the whole cave system. A photo was taken when we entered and we determined not to be 'talked into' an expensive purchase when we left. Where was our resolve when we timidly purchased the overpriced photos on exiting. We were furious with ourselves but maybe the holiday mood could be blamed.

Driving into the town of Lauren again we parked and walked to a "Taste of Home" restaurant that I had noticed earlier and it really ticked all the boxes. It was large, busy and the great staff looked after us 'oldies' so well. The centre tables were filled with Amish ladies and gentlemen celebrating a birthday. The ladies were all quite large in stature and mostly elderly and dressed in a type of old Dutch bonnet with loose fitting pastel-coloured dresses.

Some of the older men sported white beards (indicating they were married) and sported straw hats. And the young men had thick hair in a 'pudding basin' style. They all seemed very jolly.

I chatted to an elderly man and his daughter at a nearby table. He was with a war veteran. They explained that war veterans were all well respected in the US which I felt was quite the opposite in the UK.

Leaving the restaurant we, once again, drove that same stretch of road. The big difference was that now it was dark and the road was only single lane in both directions and very windy. The trouble was for the 50 odd minutes I seemed to have a trail of cars following me very close to my bumper and being on the opposite road side plus the high speed of oncoming traffic with lights dazzling us made for a most unpleasant return journey. This was compounded by the Mountain Home B&B having a tiny entrance being situated on the left hand side of a fast road. This meant Lynn looking out for a small opening, indicating in advance and hoping no-one would go speeding into the back of you.

Our joint sigh of relief each time we arrived safely could be heard across the whole of the Shenandoah Valley.

The enjoyment of the whole day made up for this unpleasant return journey and we came back ready to pack and get on with the next stage of our adventure

Saturday 13th September

Lisa and Scott kissed us goodbye and said that they had enjoyed our company as we had enjoyed theirs.

We had planned today as possibly the longest drive of our vacation: from Front Royal to Lancaster but for some reason it took almost double the time we had allowed. Our plan was to stop wherever we wanted to on route to see small town America and enjoy an unplanned day. This was great because we experienced some places we never would have seen otherwise.

The route, thanks to our Google Maps GPS was a total life saver. We had heard that the car might not have built in sat nav so we had purchased both a phone holder and connecting flex and these two small accessories were worth their weight in gold. We remembered previous long driving vacations in the US where Lynn was glued to large scale maps or latterly, holding the phone while I had pointed out spectacular scenery, only to be told that she couldn't look up. Now, there were no maps available anyway as everyone had completely gone over to Google Maps on line.

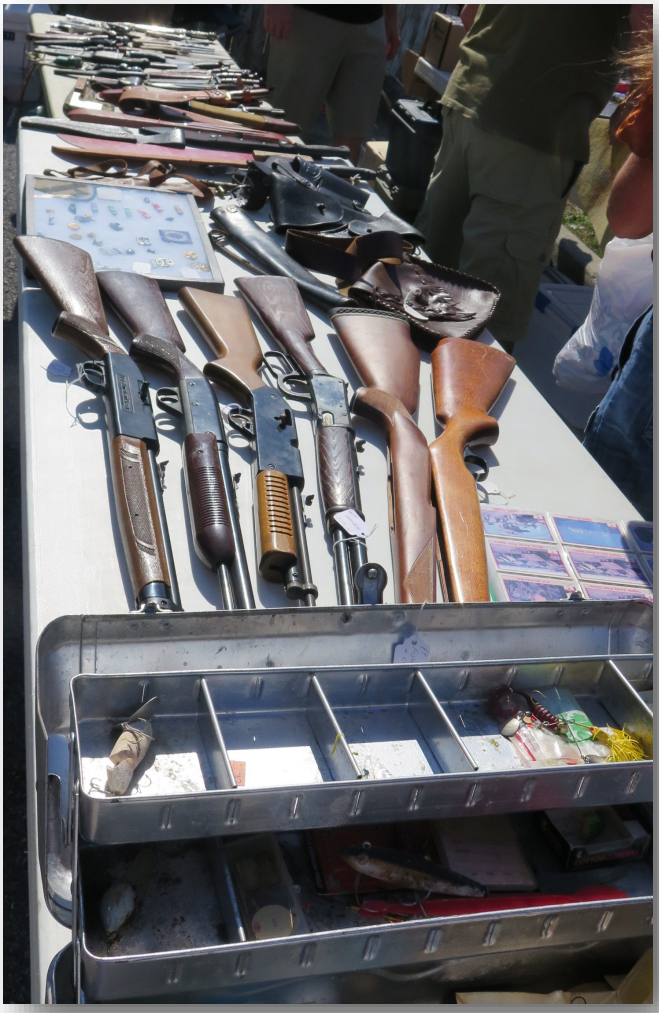
We drove through wonderful vast fields with verdant crops. Maize and pumpkins, kale and peaches were on sale and beautiful white farmhouses were dotted round in acres of close mown lawns and we saw 'ride-on' mowers frequently. Our quiet back roads were interspersed with some freeways and this was a total contrast. The small country roads were single lane with double yellow central lane markers so we were very conscious of traffic behind us unable to pass…tough…we are enjoying our travels so sorry but you'll have to bear with us. Many of the homes were of various sizes all with large plots all with lawns but no fences and nearly all were well maintained, other than a few in the small towns which seemed less affluent.

There were quite a few garden sales advertised with clothes and house bric-a-brac on the lawns

As we approached the small town of Berryville, it was a hive of activity. As we waited at the lights we saw people walking in every direction holding all their purchases. Familiar rock 'n' roll music blared out. We just had to stop. This is what we wanted to experience.

Every area of vacant land, parking lot, forecourt etc was covered with stalls all selling various unwanted house-hold items, similar to our car-boot sales. This was the day in the month when it all took off and we luckily hit right on it at the right time.

We parked and walked through the crowds and in the middle of the high street was an older guy who manned a DJ system, the source of the great music. This was interspersed with local shops advertising and the times of the danceathon in the 'alley' . We chatted to people and everyone smiled and were so great. Two ladies even posed for me with the lamps they had just bought. Some of the shops sold Americana and I even bought a small old camera which we bartered and finally agreed on a lower price of $9.00.



Some of the shops sold local crafts and were manned by the ladies who had knitted/ drawn/ sculpted the products. I even managed to buy a delightful knitted hat with rosette for Lynn from the lady who made it..and it really suited Lynn.

Girls danced line dancing in the street and my camera was running hot with so much to photograph. Even muskets, rifles, knives and other guns were on the stalls

We were sorry to leave.

Our second 'stop off' that was planned was a well known beauty spot where two rivers meet..The Shenandoah (*Daughter Of The Stars*) and The Potomac (*They who came by Water*) ..The bracketed possible meanings of the original Indian names

The town that grew up at the meeting point was strategically important in previous time and is known as Harper's Ferry. We should have been warned that maybe this was not a good spot for us when the approach was plastered with 'no parking' signs and no parking spot was available anywhere. We drove down the very steep main road totally full of tourist shops and then continued out of town still showing more 'no parking' signs everywhere. At the end of a mile or so was a car park. This was full.

By now we decided to return to the top of the hill where we had seen some spaces on the way in. We managed to park eventually and walked back down the hill. What a waste of time. A steep long walk in blazing sun past 'favourite old-fashioned sweets' and other souvenirs. At the confluence of the rivers there was a viewpoint and this was outstanding but the town was a victim of its own success and after using the facilities we left.

Continuing on our long drive, we stopped again at another small town…However, this lacked the charm of our previous stops and the snack lunch we had there was so bad that the term 'bad' is a compliment.

Our drive continued through beautiful fertile fields that we later learned were the Armish smallholdings and farms.

As we approached Lancaster we drove slowly past luxurious mansions which, again, we found out were the 'millionaires' end of town. Our hotel was The Cork Factory which was a wonderfully sensitive conversion of an original industrial building re-purposed into a modern hotel. We had mistakenly booked for two , instead of three nights, and Erin, the delightful receptionist got us the extra night at a competitive price without us having to move rooms. After a quick check of our great room we immediately went 'on the town', glad to stretch our legs after the long journey. Must admit the long drive are certainly not enjoyable anymore..guess it's an age thing.

Walking from The Cork Factory we realised that we were a little on the outskirts but the walk into town was fascinating. We found very few eating places that looked inviting but finally found a small busy oriental open kitchen where we ordered a shared meal from the counter and our name was called when it was ready. It was a veggie choice and great value.

We realised we were exhausted and were glad to get back to our room after a really varied fascinating day.

<u>Sunday 14th September 2025</u>

Travelling light with just our two small canary yellow cabin bags meant *'Launderette Days'* were necessary and we rather enjoyed these…meeting local folk and seeing how the town actually works. For that reason we were up and at the local ' Dory's House' (The launderette) by 7.00am as we had been warned Sunday mornings was a really busy time. Using pocket's full of small change Lynn filled a machine with our washing, dried it in another machine while I chatted to the owner about politics, cars and the cost of gas. We both felt good after doing 'our chores' No, seriously, the washing of clothes is no problem and it makes vacations so much easier as we had discovered on our Japan trip. Travel light and wash your clothes on the journey. We see folk at airports that have such a stack of luggage that they seem to be moving their homes.

The hotel didn't do breakfasts but gave us a list of local breakfast cafes. However we found one of our own where the owner was a delightful girl who made all the savouries and cakes herself in her spotless open kitchen and we were rewarded with the best breakfast ever (and even took her card back to our hotel to add it to their breakfast list)

Standing on the sidewalk, doing the tourist thing of checking our map, a young lady asked if we needed help.

Well, we spent the next two hours with Lisa who, it turned out was an ex tourist guide, lived locally . as had her previous generations and delighted in escorting us around her neighborhood. She owned a small Airbnb and she took us to her church and showed us the function room opposite where she had got married. She took us into Hamilton's which was a small shop/museum following on from the famous Hamilton Watch factory which covered a large part of Lancaster with its own housing.

We saw places and had explanations that we never would have had without that chance encounter and , once again, showed how , just talking to folk and not being in a mad hurry can turn the *ordinary* to the *memorable*. Lisa walked us back to our hotel and even hugged and kissed us as went we parted. A memorable first half of a Sunday in Lancaster

Sunday evening in Lancaster is a quiet time with not much open. Walking from The Cork Factory along some quiet roads which include a cemetery, some minor small housing and a semi industrial area which is slowly changing from the original use to residential lofts. I feel this whole part will be totally different in years to come and the thought that must have gone into converting the very large Old Cork Factory into a hotel was a very brave move.

The areas changed dramatically as we walked, which is always the plus side of walking. If one drives one misses all the nuances of the areas. The houses became more established and the roads were tree -lined but not many people were around, and the few that we passed all said 'hi'. Once again the houses finished and we noticed some small shops, but all were closed. Then the shops became much larger and were housed in some outstanding facades many of which had obviously been repurposed. As we approached the main crossroads we saw The historic Fulton Theatre – and the shop where Hershey had learnt his confectionary skills (now Rick's deli and bakery) and close by was the market square. We struggled to find anywhere open that looked enticing until we saw a waterfall/fountain at the end of a mall with some folk at tables, obviously eating. We joined them and Lynn had a gigantic Ceasar salad and I plumped for the local speciality ; deep walnut-oil fried sprouts with a spicy sauce and topped with blue cheese. Again, a massive portion. I had them twice…the first and last time! You might think this local delicacy sounds a little strange. You would be totally right..Not a major success in my book of Lancaster gourmet delights.

We made our tired way back but were aware of many homeless people in the centre . It was still very warm so they could just sleep on sidewalk benches but it made us feel sad. The other thing we were very aware of was the large number of very large modern buildings both for sale or to rent. Retail and offices in Lancaster seem to be having a hard time of it. It is a very interesting town with many historic buildings and seems to be a bit in limbo..trying hard to be modern and exciting but not quite making it. Never the less we had a great time here and everyone we met was super friendly.

<u>Monday 15th September.</u>

We had come to Lancaster specifically as it was known to be the centre of the Amish community. We knew a little about them, maybe from old films etc and sort of expected to see small country lanes with horsedrawn buggies transporting traditionally dressed men and women.

Yes, this is partly true, but The Amish community live outside Lancaster itself and we drove, firstly to Strasburg. Here, the main street was long and fascinating with the most delightful historic house bearing plaques showing their approx. dates :1700's onwards. Each house was close to the quiet street but each fronted a really large rear garden..almost the size of small fields. Many had Stars and Stripes flags and the vast majority were in immaculate condition. We chatted to a gardening lady and it transpired that The Amish lived on the farms all round the lovely town and made excellent neighbours

It slowly dawned on us that the Amish legend was perpetuated by the Amish themselves for a good source of revenue . They had developed large amusement parks with buggy rides, lots of Amish crafts, Amish cakes, Amish pickles, Amish bread, Amish souvenirs etc etc. yes, you guessed it..the real Amish farmed the incredibly fertile field and the prosperity could be seen by their lavish individual houses on very very large plots. Monday was washing day and all their clothes lines were decked with long lines of simple outfits..buttons were not acceptable so the lines all looked very similar.

We did succumb to a steam train trip through the Amish fields of high Amish corn, but even this was rather disappointing. No promised commentary and a shorter than promised ride to a featureless junction …a ten minute wait and then back along the same straight line.

A stop at an Amish bakery produced some ultra sweet cakes with Amish mollases cakes called Shoo -Fly…pie and Whoopy Pie..again, nothing to write home about. Why are all these confections so over sweetened? Obesity is a way of life.

We pulled into a small Country farm shop advertising fruit and veg..but despite our shouting we were unable to raise anyone's attention so we reluctantly drove out again.

Miller's Smorgasbord was our lunchtime destination. This massive establishment prided itself on its large buffet…and indeed it was the biggest selection I had ever seen. Soup and bread or rolls and salad were around $20.00 and soup, main entrees with salad and dessert was $30.00. Endless soft drinks were $3.99. The story behind Miller's was that the original Miller's was a truck stop for repairs and his wife's chicken and waffles became famous. This fledgling concept grew and grew, moved and was bought out their previous employees and their family remain the current owners. We are not great admirers of this type of dining but must admit that it is an experience.

The drive back to The Cork Factory went along a wide busy freeway with every type of large warehouse, shopping mall, garage and hotels. This is often the appearance of the traditional town outskirts where possibly locals drive out to do their shopping and like else where town centres are dying.

Our final night here so packing was the main theme…..

<u>Tuesday 16th September 2025</u>

A very early start as we don't completely totally trust our Google-estimated mileage and our car was due back before 12.15pm. It is supposed to be around 71 miles and approx. 2 hours so we filled the flask with the complimentary coffee and crept out at 6.30am. This early start is no problem for us as we are up at 5.00am every day at home…so this could even be construed as a 'lay-in' The journey was not the greatest with wide busy freeways and uninteresting stores, car dealerships and closed restaurants. Stopping at a large 'Home Farm{?} unit we bought a readymade warm cheese, bacon and egg croissant in a plastic bag. We then sat in the parking lot with our flask of coffee An incredible gourmet breakfast followed by a slice of …yes, you guessed it…Aimish mollases and fruit cake. Man, do we know how to gab life by the b***s and enjoy every waking moment. Fanfares were heard as we entered Baltimore and we followed the Google map to our Pier 5 hotel.. Apologies dear Google - the timing was spot on and so was the mileage. Obviously we were loads too early to take possession of our room so we dumped our 'canaries' (bright yellow cabin bags), backpack etc and then drove across town to an industrial estate/ out of town shopping mall to our Avis return unit. Returning our Subaru was a total contrast to when we picked it up. This time we were greeted by a smiling young lady who quickly checked it over and gave us our return documentation. The downside was that we now had walk back to our hotel. We were in no rush as the check in was 3.00pm and it was only 10.00am. The walk environment improved, but to be honest, it would have been hard-pushed to be worse. We slowly left the endless retail outlets and fast food units and we found ourselves by the harbour and then walked along the paths round Chesapeake Bay in the direction of our hotel. We found an area called Broadway which sported a market and lots of small bars and a few restaurants. It looked very atmospheric but must be a 'night place' as no one was around and everything seemed to be closed. It was around 1.30/2.00pm now, Passing a lovely looking Italian restaurant we chanced our luck and it was a great choice. Pasta and coffee with great service and a beautifully designed décor. I am , boringly, continuing with my Trip Advisor reviews (Over 300 spanning many years and countries) so gave them an excellent review. What is nice is that on the odd occasion we get a thank you response from management. I did stop the reviews for a period after Booking.com took over Trip Advisor because I felt that they were monetising reviews that people like myself were making voluntarily to help other

travelers…..but recently I find that some places try really hard and my reviews help them getting established. I must admit if sometimes things are less than perfect I will still give a good review but if I find that we are being cheated or taken for a ride, I will tell it as it is.

Anyway, I digress.

We got back to our hotel pretty tired as we had probably walked for 3-4 hours. Our room overlooked the harbour and city and the rain poured down as we sat on the bed with the balcony window open and relaxed. Nowhere is at its best in a downpour and this (apparently) is the start of the hurricane season so methinks maybe Baltimore was not the most sensible location choice. It's our first part day here so I won't form impressions too soon. After the depressing heavy downpour we went for a walk around the locality and discovered traditional ships moored around the harbour with fascinating histories and on Pier 6 adjacent to the hotel open-sided marquees had been erected and a full-on rock concert was underway. The coloured changing lights reflected in the harbour water gave a surreal effect to the crowds enjoying the music. Our reverie changed from relaxed enjoyment to annoyance as the next room seemed to be staging their own public performance. The fact that it was 1.30am and they were on the next balcony did not amuse us. Suddenly a shrill. *"Pipe Down"* was heard from another room and they immediately did just that.

Wednesday 17th September 2025

Breakfast was 'amateurville' with a girl slowly cooking eggs and a few self-service items on a sad buffet but we made the most of it as we realised that our hotel was modern, our room was acceptable, the rates were realistic, the location was right in the heart of The Inner Harbour, so why complain.

Baltimore has a pretty efficient 'free' bus system so we spent a while figuring out where the bus stops were and decided to recce our departure route by train from Penn Station. People were great in helping us find the stops and even the bus driver was a star. Glad we didn't walk there because we saw the route and decided to 'Uber' our journey when we leave. Taking The Purple Route north we passed the famous Mount Vernon on our journey.

Penn station was a delight. Very quiet, with a few Amtrak police plus dog patrolling. And marble pillars, wrought iron balustrades and old lights. The stained glass domed roof gave lots of light and it didn't strike one as a busy railway station.

Rather than chancing last minute train tickets, we got our 'senior' advance tickets for Friday morning in advance, and then commenced our long walk back to our hotel. The bus journey had gone through areas we wanted to check out in more detail by walking and Mount Vernon was our aimed location. Just wandering the streets armed with a map always seems to attract folk proud of their country and city…and Mount Vernon was no exception. Greg stopped us to see if he could help and believe it or not we chatted for over one hour about everything from politics, world history, medicine to banking . He was only 28, studying medicine, and was a mine of information and like Lisa who we had befriended in Lancaster, his descendants were Irish. He insisted we should not miss the Peabody Library next to where we were talking and we were so glad we took his advice. It was totally awe-inspiring…thousands of old and new books housed in a unique setting. I have photographed it with full info so I won't duplicate it. We left it totally enthralled with the foresight to collect and house this vast collection.

Around Mount Vernon with its imposing horse mounted top were many original stately homes and Gregg knew not only who originally lived there but also dates. People like Greg make Google unnecessary.

We continued our slow walk back to our hotel just stopping in the curious Peabody Melody café adjacent to the main building for a coffee. A long walk of over two hours and we saw so much of 'hidden Baltimore'

An afternoon rest was an agreed necessity as we had booked an evening meal at The Rusty Schooner which was the day's highlight at night

The Rusty Schooner is a large conspicuous restaurant overlooking the harbour and can be seen from everywhere. It looked like a ten minute walk but we forgot that we had to follow the harbour walk all the way round and we arrived just in time for our booking. Lynn treated me to this grand meal as the menu ticked all the boxes. We hoped it would live up to our expectations. It totally did. A great reception as we got to the top of the stairs. A really large restaurant with windows overlooking the harbours all round and tables on many levels. It was fairly busy but it must be difficult to fill that vast area every night. It was discretely lit with small table lamps. The service was so friendly and attentive and the food was exceptional and I hope the pictures show the artistry. Yes, it was expensive and we can't get used to the American way of 'suggesting' tips and they started at 18% then 20% and finally 22%. This is added to the meal which already has state and liquor tax added. It was an occasional treat and such a lovely gesture to be taken out by my lovely missus for no special reason.

We were glad to have that longish walk back after such a big meal and somehow, seeing so many down and outs along the harbour walk made us feel uncomfortable. Not unsafe, but feeling guilty having enjoyed our evening when others have nothing. The smell of weed is everywhere and the homeless problem in Baltimore is very obvious as is the number of empty units and offices. Baltimore is in the middle of a massive regeneration programme but the lack of footfall everywhere makes us wonder how successful it will be. Hopefully the 'new' Baltimore will attract tourism because the history and layout is pretty unique and deserves to be better known.

Tomorrow's adventures are taking shape and we have checked maps, and sought advice so hopefully, once again, we will see some new and exciting parts. The ball game is booked for 7.30pm so we have also found how to walk to Camden Yard, the stadium grounds. Probably getting an Uber back.

Thursday 18th September 2025

The weather forecast was rain for the first couple of hours so we packed our anoraks and set off after breakfast. I had pencilled in a great walk through parts of Baltimore we had not really seen up to this time. It is amazing that with maps, rather than Google maps, it is just a short while before one can familiarise oneself with the city layout. It was already hot so the weather forecast was thankfully wrong because bad weather always effects even the most optimistic spirit.

Our first destination was Little Italy, and as it was pretty early, the small restaurants still not having opened, it was easy to see why this cobbled street area of small houses and narrow streets was a favourite with both locals and tourists.

Knead Street Bakery in Central Street was a 'must visit' eatery for coffee and cakes. Yes, it was glitzy and well stocked with the bakery itself behind large glass windows, but frankly, not for us. We were going to have cakes (which were nothing special, and seemed to include donuts with every topping a fertile mind could create) but the way in which our (mediocre) drinks were thrust at us with no smile or even human reaction did not inspire us , so we paid and left. The moral may be not to follow others to that *"special place you must just visit"*

Broadway Market was our next destination which we were informed by a teacher herding his young flock into the seating area was reputed to be the oldest market still trading in the USA. Maybe it was the oldest site but we doubted that much else was original as stainless steel fridges and bars, counters and seating filled the area. Void of customers at around 10.30am (and the schoolkids certainly weren't there to spend money), we realised this must be a night venue.

The Irish influence was obvious by the number of themed Irish pubs and bars and there was even a Guiness brewery locally. Just at the far side of this fascinating tree-lined area , past quirky small shops and eateries we came to Fells Point.

My hard work planning this route found us by the far side of the harbour by Pier 8, in Fell's Point (another previous dock area that was gentrified and retained a lot of character) This was the take-off point across the river to Locust Point. The ferry was a 'Harbour Connector' part of the fantastic Baltimore free transport system. As always ,when we asked a local lad if he knew when the ferry left, he got out his phone and directed us to the right Pier. The 3 Harbour Connector Ferry's and 5 City Coloured bus routes are all free, frequent and manned by staff who are cheerful and very helpful. A really impressive city initiative.

Landing at Locust Point we made our way along roads with no helpful signposts to the National Shrine of Fort McHenry which is now a designated historical site. Tourists must be keen to see this whole large fort complex and directions are remarkably badly signposted. Inside the park area, the fort has excellent informative signs and boards showing how the Americans had bravely repelled the British sea invasion in 1841. I guess this was possibly the narrowest stretch of water and the hot cannonballs caused so much potential damage to the wooden ships that the British retreated. A ranger was most instructive and, as always, people loved to help you with information (checking the date the damaged bridge had been hit by a cargo boat, how many workers died etc etc).

We sat on seats in the baking sun, looking out over the wide busy industrious harbour with US navy boats moored along the far bank and silos and industry were apparent.

Outside the fort area was a small pull-in area and the Purple Route Charm City Circulator bus pulled in after a short, but very hot, wait. This was the final part of my planned circuit where, amazingly, this bus took us back all the way back to our hotel.

We stopped across the busy main road and took a meal back to our room but it was so hot on our balcony that we had to eat it in our air-conditioned room.

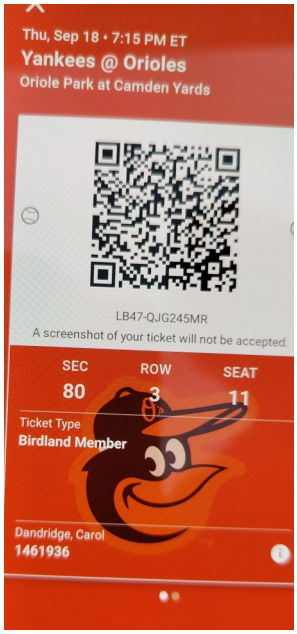
We had booked tickets for the New York Yankees v Baltimore (home team) game at The Yard. The Yard is a really well known Baseball stadium but nothing prepared us for the actuality. Several of my on-line attempts to book tickets were unsuccessful as my UK postcode seemed to be a problem each time.

A final booking via Trip Advisor seemed to do the trick, but I had an uncomfortable feeling about the tickets. A confirmation arrived with the required bar code but no specific seat numbers were given. We had walked close to The Yard on previous walks so we knew how far it was. I suggested we leave in good time in case the tickets proved a problem and also to soak up the pre-game atmosphere. Baltimore Oriels had had a bad season and they were playing several new players and this was an important match.

The streets were packed with folk arriving at the ground and the atmosphere was electric. Tee-shirt sellers, and loads of food carts lined the approach, but the main attraction was a fantastic dance group dancing in precise timing outside the ground.

This is where our problems started. We queued through the security arches and then our ticket bar code was scanned, but not accepted. The great young girl tried and tried and checked the emails from Trip Advisor. She called a manager and he tried and ok'd our entry but with no seat numbers . **The *'Can I Help you'*** lady' gave us badges with 'first time Oriole's printed on it and then took us to a senior manager who took us to his office and we felt like we were in deep trouble. He tried scanning the bar code again but with no luck and said it looked like a scam and he was sorry and then generously gave us two seats in a great area.

What a result…. funny, how I had a bad feeling about those tickets.



The long pre-match walk round the stadium covered areas was amazing. People getting gigantic plates of food at every concession. Made our cinema hot dogs look pathetic. No-one seemed to be without platters of food piled high and gigantic ice-laden drinks twice the size of the UK normal drink size. Our seats were above the area facing the pitcher and what a sight. Impossible to know where to look first. Adverts changing all-round the massive illuminated stadium as darkness fell. The score board with films, info and loads of statistics that meant nothing whatsoever to us. As people came up the stairs next to us they could hardly hold their massive platters and we wondered if they had come for the match or a pig-out feast. The screen showed past performance statistics and sales guys with heavy crates of beers on their shoulders went up and down the aisles. Girls with iced lemon and strawberry drinks on their heads were selling it at breakneck speed. We were quickly informed that only card payment was accepted and ..believe it or not…an additional tip was expected . The game commenced and we tried to understand what was happening. I sort of grasped the bare outline but things kept happening and people screamed approval or disapproval at certain times. The chants were all alien to us and we so enjoyed every minute. Screens showed people around the vast arena dancing and waving extatically when the camera showed them on the giant screen. There was a hot dog race with guys (or maybe girls) in fancy dress parading around. The Oriole mascot was such an animated character and kids danced with him. On the screen an ex-player actually proposed to his girlfriend and the crowd went mad.

Clapping and chanting were encouraged by the commentary on the sound system and we were over the moon to be part of this great event. We were given Oriel necklaces by the the ***'Can I Help you'*** lady who recognised us as we left. Even the turnstile girl recognised us and asked us if we had enjoyed the game.

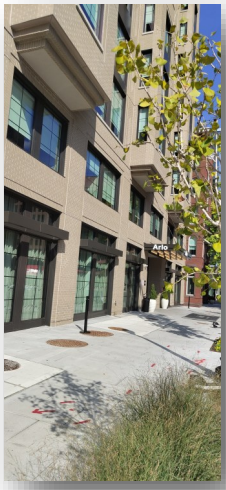
As we piled out en-masse it was in a crowd of well-behaved people who had enjoyed another great night out (despite losing 4 nil to the NY Yankees). Lynn had been worried about us having to walk back in quiet streets. The opposite was the case. Crowded , well-lit streets and we were back at our hotel in under 20 minutes.

Friday 19th September 2025.

We arrived in rain and left in hot weather and sunshine. Our first, less than happy, Baltimore impressions had been entirely dispelled and other than the poor sad condition of an otherwise beautiful hotel in an enviable position we ended up really enjoying Baltimore. We had a quick early morning walk around our hotel to the lighthouse and then bought our cases down and our Uber was right on time. He took us to Baltimore Penn station which is unlike any UK stations I had seen. The Amtrack train came in on time and the seating was comfortable but had small, quite dirty, windows and looked like an aluminium cigar case. I was glad to get out after the 45 minute journey to Washington.

We again booked and Uber but he cancelled and we waited in the heat for an unacceptably long time eventually ending up hailing a red Cab which cost about the same. Uber charged for this cancelled cab plus charging for contacting their help line so I will have to sort this out.

Our new hotel was The Arlo and it was the total opposite of our previous one. Cases taken from our cab by cheerful guys and a smart busy lobby with cheerful professional staff. We were ages too early for our rooms so we walked around locally, enjoying a pizza slice in a tree-lined seating area at the roadside. We walked around and found a great bakery for coffee and a cake and then enjoyed the shade in a small park by the Lawyers University. The hotel was situated in the centre once again and we have chosen really great places in very different locations so we were pretty pleased with all our planning. When we located our room, we were delighted. On the 12th floor with great views.



I even managed to get a swim in the small rooftop pool and we were by the bar with some great views including Capitol Hill .

The rooftop bar was having a drink promotion with 'beautiful people' getting free drinks cards. After the swim we waked around the bar area and the outside terrace had some incredible views including the Capitol building which was illuminated and very close. As sunset came amazingly quickly everyone was looking at the Washington scene all around. A lovely young couple got chatting to us and the girl was studying medicine locally and he was studying physiotherapy in Baltimore. They gave Lynn one of their free drink tokens and Lynn was treated to an expertly dispensed frozen margherita.

A great end to a very long day.

Saturday 20th September

Almost at the end of a really varied holiday with so much variety..from beautiful unspoilt countryside to big cities. Lots of great people, very different hotels and accommodation and lots of fabulous walks.

We had decided on visiting the National Art Gallery and despite hearing to the contrary, we found it had free entry. Wielding my map I negotiated our short walk from the hotel close to the Mall which we had walked all along originally when we were staying in Georgetown. This is a famous area in Washington, with just cause. At a war memorial we saw a coach bringing disabled war veterans and four young uniformed National Guards helped them off the coach and we then overheard one saying "may I shake your hand sir and thank you for what you did for us" ..we were so touched to hear this it almost brought a tear to our eyes. The museum was beautiful and the centre atrium with huge black marble pillars was stunning. The information staff were so friendly and helpful and the viewing galleries were well signposted and curated. So many fabulous art works but we only managed to view a small part of the amazing collection. We were told that The Photography Exhibition commenced on Sunday so we hope to be able to include that on our last day. We left the exhibition and crossed the Constitution Road and made our way to Central / 10th Avenue as Lynn 'just had to see' the fashions in that exclusive area. All the names were there, as in all major cities. The surroundings were quiet and it all seemed quite sterile and uninspiring.

All the streets generally seemed quiet with very few tourists and as it was a not a working day there were not many locals around either.

Before making our way back to the hotel we enjoyed a Spanish meal sitting in a covered street-side eating area next to the restaurant and we enjoyed the meal having decided to 'select' parts off the menu and share them. This comprised a red beet salad with citrus, blue cheese and nuts…Spanish ham croquettes, and Manchego cheese drizzled with olive oil. A well balanced lunch and we gave ourselves a pat on the back for making such a great selection.

Walking back to the hotel we chanced on Chinatown which, like Chinatown in the UK, was uninspiring. Unlike Little Italy in Baltimore which looked fun and encouraged people to enjoy a meal out.

A short and sweet last swim (probably) on our hotel rooftop was our next location,

We took a walk from the hotel to see parts of Washington DC that were unknown to us and found a short walk from the hotel. A Saturday night scene that was vibrant and buzzy. On a corner was a vacant lot where a small marquee had been erected with loud music blaring and security all round it. As we ventured closer we saw some great outfits and a fun crowd. The small photo area was busy. It transpired that it was a gay fun party with a small stage hosting a drag queen and everyone seemed to be having a great time. Further along the road were so many restaurants from Ottoman, Turkish, Thai, Indian, Italian and many others and nearly all seemed to be busy. .

We noticed, again, many retail shops were permanently closed and looking up we saw so many huge blocks of offices that were also empty. Not sure if this is typical as we have seen this in many other areas too. Walking round Washington over a few days we were very aware that compared to other cities like Vienna and, especially London, it seems quiet. Roads were

very quiet and generally there appeared to be less people around than we had anticipated

Sunday 21st September.

After a last great breakfast in our hotel we stashed our cases at reception and checked out. We now felt like 'old timers' around town and easily found The Museum of Space and Aircraft. This is a popular destination for young and old and although not massive was a fascinating very modern venue, Staff were helpful and it was just at the side of The Mall and easy to locate. As people had to prebook timed arrival slots (free), it was busy but well organised.

The Black Lives Matter Photography exhibition started on our last day so that was well timed. It was in a designated area of the National Museum of Art and it was well curated and easy to walk round as it was still not well known and we enjoyed it.

As we had come in we saw several galleries that caught our eye that we had not seen previously and we were astounded to see so many fantastic, well known, art masterpieces under one roof. Neither of us really appreciate these works but that it just us….clearly they are appreciated by masses and maybe we are philistines but different art works appeal to us more.

Anyway, back to the hotel, booked our Uber to take us to Dulles International Airport and our American Adventure draws to it close. Maybe once this blog is illustrated with some selected photos it will be a great reminder of the great fun we had and be lovely to recall it all when we become old (joke!!)